Lafayette Historical Society
NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, California 94549

President: William Wakeman (283-3908)
Editor: Shirley Thomson (284-2995)

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Now that we have ushered in New Year 1993 and the Chinese have launched the Year of the Rooster, the Society wants to let its members know about future events that could be of interest.

On Thursday, February 25, 1993, at 7:30 p.m., Friends of the Lafayette Library are going to present "An Evening from California's Past" at the Lafayette Public Library. Naomi Caspe will dress in period clothes and re-enact events described by Dame Shirley in her stories and letters during her visits from England to California's mining camps in the 1800s. It should be an interesting evening.

In April, on Saturday, the 24th, Lafayette United Methodist Church plans to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the old school building now incorporated as part of the church. Specific times and events are still in the planning stages.

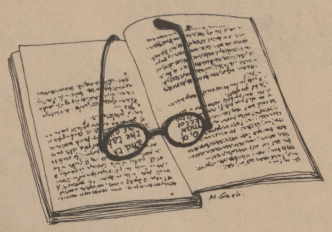
Our annual potluck dinner is scheduled for Tuesday, May 11, 1993. More details will appear in our next newsletter.

Now is the time to pay dues for 1993. And while you're at it, try to recruit a new member. Also, we could use help—new hands or old hands—for work I outlined in my October letter: displays, oral history, and research, as well as docents for the fourth-graders' historical walks. Give me a call if you can help (283-3908).

Best wishes for the New Year,

Bill

William Wakeman



NEW BOOK BY ANDREW YOUNG

Andrew Young, author of *The Improvers of Lafayette* and past president of LHS and CCCHS, has a new book for people interested in local history. It's titled *Ways Back: Historical Societies and Their Resources in Contra Costa County*.

Andy, who helped set up CCCHS's History Center in Pleasant Hill, says the publication grew out of a need discovered there. Volunteers at the Center found that visitors and callers often were simply looking for a "way back," a way to their community's history, to the sites, resources, and people involved in preserving its history. All kinds of people with an interest in the subject—including students from grade school to graduate school, family history researchers, journalists, new residents—often were frustrated in finding a way to the resources available. Andrew Young, eminently qualified pathfinder, shows the way.

Ways Back is available at Amadeus Books, 3369 Mt. Diablo Boulevard (phone: 284-2665), in Lafayette. Price is $5.95. >

METHODIST CHURCH MARKS TWO SPECIAL DAYS IN 1993

The historic building that serves Lafayette United Methodist Church at 955 Moraga Road is to be the site of two notable community celebrations in 1993.

The first event, on January 24, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the church sanctuary. The larger community was invited to share in the ceremonies and dinner and to talk with special guest, "Squire Elam Brown," as presented by our own Ray Peters.

Then, in the spring—as mentioned in the President's message—the Church will celebrate a hundred years of service to the people of Lafayette by Old Schoolhouse Number Three.

There will be more on the April event in the spring issue of this newsletter. Call Nancy Flood (evenings, 283-3409) for earlier information. >

1992-93 Officers and Committee Chairs

President	*Bill Wakeman*
Vice President	*Jop Van Overveen*
Treasurer	*Shirley Thomson*
Recording Secretary	*Ruth Dyer*
Corresponding Secretary	*Ollie Hamlin*
Annual Potluck Dinner	*Richard Johnson and Ollie Hamlin*
Archives	*Irma Somerton*
Book Sales	*Ruth Dyer*
Fire Engine	*George Wasson*
Hist. Displays	*Bill & Irma Somerton*
Landmarks	*Bob Means*
Membership	*Jack Bailey*
Oral History	*Ray Peters, Marechal Duncan, George Wasson, and Nancy Flood*
Newsletter	*Shirley Thomson*
Program	*Jop Van Overveen*
Publicity	*Diddo Clark*
Walking Tours	*Collette Means*

DUES

Student membership	*$2.50*
Family membership	*$10.00*
Business membership	*$50.00*
Life membership	*$100.00*

NEXT BOARD MEETING

The next meeting of LHS Board members and committee chairs is scheduled for Tuesday, March 9, in the meeting room at Town Hall. Members are welcome. >

With permission of the author, we are delighted to reprint here a thoughtful piece published in the December 1992 **North Hills Phoenix Association News**.

Many of our readers know fellow members Mary and Ned Flanders well and are aware of their tragic loss of their home in the Hiller Highlands fire of October 1991. Here Mary shares insights gained in coping with the loss of family treasures and keepsakes, the much-loved reminders of family and personal history.

In the event your experience (as your editor's) does not include acquaintance with a "tansu," Mary tells me that it is an oriental chest.

Thank you, Mary. And thanks to Oliver Hamlin for bringing this to our attention. — Ed.

A FIRE SURVIVOR COPES

by Mary Powell Flanders

On October 20, 1991, when the fire destroyed all our material possessions I tried telling myself that "material possessions" are not most important; we still have each other, our families, our friends, our memories. And indeed we did, and do. But as the months pass I realize that many of our lost objects were intricately tied to us, to our family, friends, and most certainly, to our memories. Even now I can hardly separate the memories from the objects I have lost.

When I think of Granny I realize how much I miss wearing her engagement ring. She gave it to me on my eighteenth birthday, the day before Valentine's Day. The center chocolate in a heart-shaped box of candy had been replaced by a small purple velvet ring box. Her silver footed butter dish with the insert tray for butter balls reminded me of her regular morning chore, rolling little cubes of butter between the wooden, grooved paddles. When I think of my grandfather, "Big Daddy," I remember the little slipper chair beside our fireplace on which his mother sat, he told me, to button her shoes, in St. Louis, in the 1860s. Thoughts of my Grandma Powell remind me of her hand-painted china I brought out for special parties. Grandpa Powell makes me think of the years of research I did on the subject of his emigration from Wales to California; piles of paper, photos, prints, a published article, now ashes. When I think of my parents I remember so many objects which made me think of them, every day: the bedside table Father made to match Mother's tansu; Mother's antique furniture she inherited from Granny; many books my parents read and passed on to me; and of course, the photographs. They are the greatest loss because they could bring us immediately in touch with everyone we knew and loved. Yes, material objects are terribly important. We can't comprehend their value until they are gone. Their ashes have, in some inevitable way, joined the ashes of my ancestors whose belongings they were. I was simply a custodian of their treasures for a part of my lifetime.

How do we get along without these possessions? Some people rush out and replace everything that the insurance money can buy. My reaction was the opposite. I cannot replace those objects I really cared about, so I won't buy anything except the bare essentials needed to keep house. Now, living temporarily in a furnished apartment where I have not had to buy anything in order to keep house, has allowed me to continue this attitude, but gradually I have come to realize that the new house will be empty when it is rebuilt. We must put things back into it. There will be "essentials," but there can also be lovely decorative furnishings again. I might even be tempted to have another tansu even if it will not have been Granny's. I have been nudged in this direction by a cousin who wants to give me an old walnut dresser which I used as a girl growing up in Lafayette but which I let my mother "loan" to our cousin when Mother noticed that my husband and I were entering a "contemporary" phase of house furnishing and she was afraid I might sell the antique dresser to buy "Danish Modern." But we emerged safely from that phase in time for Mother to leave me the antiques she had inherited from her mother. Our daughters and granddaughters could hardly wait to inherit their share. They grew up using them and hearing the stories of their ancestors. Material objects are very important. I seem to be willing to gather them on again.

Who are these people whose objects seem to have had such a hold on me? Because their belongings were reduced to ashes, just as they themselves have been as the years went by, do I need to create on paper who they were? As if, having lost the objects that kept me in touch with them, must I now write their biographies so that I will not forget these people, and can let my children and grandchildren know these ancestors, especially now that they will never inherit their possessions? Are biographies the only chance they now have for immortality? All the raw data are gone. Truly my ancestors are at my mercy as I now write their life histories. > >

LAFAYETTE THREATENED WITH DESTRUCTION AS HOTEL BURNS; WALNUT CK. FIREMEN SAVE HOMES

—G—

Pioneer Hostlery Is Burned To Ground, One Cottage Also Destroyed

—G—

Fire, starting in the second floor close to the flue leading from the kitchen range, late yesterday afternoon completely destroyed the pioneer Lafayette Hotel and for a time threatened to wipe out a considerable portion of the village, until the Walnut Creek, Danville and Concord fire trucks arrived with crews of men to aid in the fight to save homes and stores in the vicinity.

Nick Devine, employe of Vince Greko who conducted the hotel business, was alone in the building at the time the fire was disovered. He had started the fire in the kitchen range an hour before to prepare for the arrival of the chef to prepare the evening meal. At 4:20 P. M. flames were seen to burst from the windows in the second floor bedrooms and before hand fire extinguishers could be brought into play the entire second floor was ablaze and the building doomed.

Frantic calls for assistance in fighting the fire were telephoned to Walnut Creek and relayed to Danville and Concord. All three departments responded. Walnut Creek firemen, under command of Deputy Fire Warden Guy Spencer, were the first to arrive in Lafayette and stationed their pumper at the creek bank to provide the only stream of water. Lafayette citizens and home owners were loud in their praise of the firemen who came to their aid and especially for the prompt response and splendid work of the Walnut Creek department, without whose timely arrival the fire toll would have been much heavier

Volunteer fire fighters with a garden hose succeeded in saving the telephone exchange and post office immediately west of the hotel. The roof of the Robert McNeil home, 50 yards to the east and across the road, was set afire several times by burning limbs dropping from a tall pine tree which was set afire by the intense heat, and a small store building near McNeil's store was afire several times. Traffic officer Ed. Keefe did telling work in the extinguishing of these incipient fires.

Frank Lloyd, trucking contractor, who occupied a small cottage immediately south of the hotel with his family, succeeded in saving practically all of his belongings. Some furnishings were removed from the hotel and carried across the highway to safety. Another pile of salvaged furniture piled across the side street from the burning hotel, caught fire from the heat and was totally destroyed.

Several fire fighters were badly blistered about the face and hands and two Pacific Gas and Electric linemen, Oliver Davis and G. H. Saunders, received painful burns.

The heat was so intense that electric power line poles 100 feet away were nearly burned through. Traffic on the tunnel road was completely blocked for over an hour while the fire was in progress, the heat being so great that even the firemen could not approach close enough to the building to play water on the flames.

The Lafayette Hotel was one of the oldest hostleries in Contra Costa county. It was built by Milo J. Hough in 1853 at the junction of the tunnel highway and the "Jonah Hill" road and although remodeled several times in the intervening 75 years has continued to be a center of community activity. The property and building were owned by Phil Lamp. Vince Greko of Alhambra Valley, was the lessee and contract purchaser of the hotel business. The loss is estimated at over $20,000 partially covered by insurance.

Lafayette in olden days was the trading center for a wide area, stockmen, ranchers and men employed in the lumber mills of Redwood canyon making Lafayette their headquarters. It was at that time that the hotel was built by Hough. For years it was a stage station, the stables where "changes" of coach horses were kept being in the rear. In its day the Lafayette hotel was one of the largest hostleries in the county and boasted one of the longest bars, where timber cruisers, mill workers, rangeriders, a few miners and the usual array of gamblers were wont to gather to swap yarns, slake their thirst and chance their monthly wages on the turn of a card. It was there that the politicians in their periodical sortie for votes also gathered.

Lafayette today the center of a rapidly developing summer-country home section and a highway "watering place" for tourists and their cars like, was once a hustling, bustling mart of trade and of that activity, the Lafayette hotel, today a mass of smoldering ruins, was the center.

—G—

Thanks to Ruth Dyer for submitting this newspaper article from the **Contra Costa Gazette** *dated June 7, 1928. The hotel site, described in this piece as the "junction of the tunnel highway and 'Jonah Hill' road," is, of course, the site of World Savings and Loan at the southwest corner of the intersection of Mt. Diablo Blvd. and Moraga Rd. —Ed.*

MEMBER INFORMATION

last name | first name | spouse's first name

street address | phone number

city, state, zip code | date

Annual dues: Please check appropriate line indicating amount of dues payable, attach your check in the amount shown—adding any contribution you can make toward the fire engine repair fund—and mail to **Lafayette Historical Society, P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, California 94549**.

___ Student membership - $ 2.50
___ Family membership - $ 10.00
___ Business membership - $ 50.00
___ Life membership - $100.00

DUES $_____
Contribution to help maintain fire engine _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED: $_____

Please indicate your areas of special interest

___ Archives
___ Landmarks
___ Fire engine
___ Telephone committee
___ Annual potluck dinner committee
___ Research
___ Other: _____

___ Oral history
___ Photograph collection
___ Newspaper clippings
___ Walking tours
___ Displays

Friends of the Lafayette Library

An evening from California's past will be celebrated at the library on Thursday, February 25, when Naomi Caspe performs as England's 19th century Dame Shirley. She will inform and entertain with stories of her travels in frontier and mining camp towns. >

The photograph above was made at Plaza Park on October 18 at the dedication of our Pony Express historical marker. Left to right: Alexandra Anton, winner of the essay contest at Lafayette School; Joe Nardone, Director, National Pony Express Association; and Marechal Duncan, LHS Pony Express Committee Chairperson.

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